

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
September 11, 2008

Members and Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Joel Gordon, Doris Holden, Kathy Koplow, Barbara Sutherland, Juana Trujillo, David Yaukey

Absent: Rosemary Kofler, Joan Golowich

Select Board Liaison, Gerry Weiss: present for most of the meeting

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Giovanna Mix (Administrative Assistant for Programs), Lisa White (Director, Senior Health Services)

Guests: Marge Babb, Lillian Scott, Allen Hanson (UMass), Phoebe Sessions (Smith College)

Welcome:

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:10 AM. Barbara welcomed all and gave the public the opportunity to make comment. There was no comment.

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

The minutes of the July 10, 2008, meeting were approved and accepted.

Friends of Amherst Senior Center Treasurer's Report:

Doris provided a handout showing a balance of \$6,074.49 in the checking account and \$550.00 in the Stay Put account. There is \$81,991.22 in the investment account. The report was approved and accepted.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

UMass-Smith Computer Report:

Allen Hanson, UMass Professor/Computer Science and **Phoebe Sessions**, Smith College Professor/School for Social Work, gave a short update of the NSF Computer research project here at the Amherst Senior Center. NSF has been a collaborative project between computer and social sciences and elders to understand the needs, priorities and potential problems of computer-assisted technology to help elders enhance and empower their lives and to help them to age in place. During the first part of the study, focus groups were held with participation of the elders to help with the design of the technology using their input. They designed a system based on what people cared about most and a system that was computer friendly. The second phase of the study recruited research participants to try out the system which was installed at the Amherst Senior Center. Graduate students from both institutions provided on-going training and coaching of the 25 participants who signed up for the study. Of the 25, 16 people completed the entire study. The information that was gathered is now being analyzed but Allen reported a preliminary sense of the findings. During the study the participants were very vocal. Changes were made along the way for people who were less computer experienced. Participants learned to use the calendar, address book, video phone, mail system, internet browser and games on the computer. At the Senior Center, some of the technology, such as the video technology of detecting falls in one's apartment or finding keys, was not addressed because the Senior Center is a public place and these features would involve privacy and security issues. One of the interesting developments that came about because of the study was how very supportive people were of the project and of each other. Professor Hanson thanked the Amherst Senior Center for their support. The next step for the project is to write another proposal and hope it is accepted. The researchers then hope to install a system at geriatric centers. A full report at a public forum will follow on **Tuesday, October 14th, at 3PM**, at the Bangs Community Center.

Nancy thanked Professors Hanson & Sessions and stated that it was an honor to have the project here at the Senior Center.

NEW BUSINESS

Form Change for Emergency Fund:

Maura stated that the Senior Center is looking for the COA to provide input and guidelines on issues and parameters having to do with emergency fund grant requests. Under the Senior Trust, if an elder came to her in dire need of money to pay for medicine, food, rent, utilities and such, Maura could write a check up to \$200 without prior approval of the Trust. If more than \$200 was needed, the approval of the Trust was required. Sometimes the money would be paid back and sometimes it was not. Now that the money is in the hands of the Friends of the Amherst Senior Center, Maura would like the COA to give some parameters to the Friends group to consider such as:

- Should there be income guidelines?
- Would there be a cap? (i.e. amount of money, number of times a year, etc.)
- What are some of the needs that would be considered emergencies?

With winter coming upon us and the troubled state of the economy, there could be a number of elders in need who will be asking for assistance from the Senior Center.

Joel expressed concern that the funds in the Friends could be depleted very quickly if a lot of elders are looking for assistance. **Kathy** asked Maura for the number of people that were given assistance within the last year. Maura said that the numbers in the past haven't been high, but she reiterated that this year might be different and we should be prepared.

Dan suggested that because there are too many questions to deal with at this current COA meeting, that a subcommittee should be formed to address the issues and that the group could present their recommendations at the next meeting. Barbara, Doris, Juana & Dan volunteered for this subcommittee and a meeting was scheduled at the Bangs for Wednesday, September 17th, at 3 PM. Dan asked if we know how the Friends envision the use of their money and how that compares to the Senior Center's thinking.

Maura informed the COA that she will be attending a conference on Thursday, September 25th, at the Hogan Campus Center, Holy Cross, Worcester, called "Surviving at Home in Hard Times". This conference will deal with the impact of high energy cost on seniors with fixed incomes and strategies for coping.

Nancy also mentioned that some Senior Centers will become "warming centers" for those who need to keep warm this winter. We need to be concerned.

Community Choices Committee:

Gerald Weiss reported on the Community Choices Committee. Like many towns and cities across Massachusetts, Amherst's budget is under stress. He told the COA that the budget picture looks "very grim." The Budget Coordinating Group (BCG), a group made up of members from the schools, library and town government, has been meeting to try to pull together what the budget will be for the next five fiscal years and how to present the budget picture to the community. Each department of the Town has been asked to present four budget scenarios for the upcoming fiscal years (FY 10 to FY 15). The budget scenarios are 1.) 2 ½% cut in budget, 2.) a level funded budget, 3.) a budget with a little more money and 4.) a budget with a lot of money. In May, the Select Board appointed a temporary 10-member Committee called the Community Choices Committee (9 voting members). This committee will have the task of reviewing the components of Amherst's budget, formulating alternative scenarios for the next 5 years, and presenting the results to the citizens of Amherst to study, debate, and ultimately decide the future path for the town.

On October 2nd from 7-10 PM in the Town Room, Town Hall, the Community Choices Committee will have its first presentation. At this forum they will answer questions and gather feedback. There will be another forum on October 20th at the Bangs Community Center from 2-3 PM.

Gerry stated that it is important to get all information out to the press and the public in a timely manner and that the information needs to be comprehensive so that the public can make an informed decision if there is a need for an override.

Dan feels that Proposition 2 ½ should be changed as inflation is more than 2 ½% and that if the people vote for the elimination of the state income tax it would be a disaster for the towns. Gerry agreed.

"My Senior Center" Program:

Nancy informed COA members that the Senior Center is getting a new software program called "My Senior Center" from Xavus Solutions, LLC. The purchase price is \$6,400 of which the Senior Center Program Gift Account is paying \$2,400 and the IT Dept is paying 4,000. This program will track statistics for the Senior Center as well as for state reporting purposes and will be a tremendous help to staff. The system has been delivered and there will be training and input time before the system is up and running. Seniors will have a card to swipe and then use a touch screen to enter which program they will be attending. There will be an annual maintenance fee the Senior Center will be able to manage.

STAFF REPORTS

Senior Health Services:

Lisa gave her August report on Senior Health Services administered. She had 66 clients in August for a grand total of 468 client visits (383 of those were repeat visits). Lisa reported that she staffed the Ann Whalen Wellness Center for the summer because the UMass students were on break. Being at the Ann Whalen Wellness Center has enabled her to develop relationships with many elder residents there and her connection with them is expected to continue even after the student nurses return. Lisa's time outside her Bangs clinics is funded by a grant from Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The next outreach phase she plans is to the Senior Center's 100+ home-delivered meal recipients and also residents of the Clark House.

Stay Put Update:

Maura reported that she met with Joel Gordon and Georgia Westervelt. Georgia is working with Maura on the "Private Pay Help List" and is getting feedback for improvements. They are trying to make that program a better one to serve elders.

Maura has been to several meetings and they have talked about Stay-Put coming under the umbrella of the Senior Center. This would be another component that would help elders.

Joel has been meeting with the Interim Study Group (ISG) and they have decided that one project to work on would be to compile a list of service providers (Plumbers, Electricians, Carpenters) who are trustworthy and would give a discount to seniors. The ISH wants to partner with the Senior Center for mutual support and to expand services.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

40th Anniversary Sub-Committee:

Nancy reported. The 40th Anniversary dinner invitation has been sent. The food, entertainment, reception, and speakers are all set for Sunday, October 19th. She has been working on the booklet that will showcase the history of the Amherst Senior Center for the last 40 years. This is a laborious task and the booklet will not be ready for the October 19th dinner but will be by the end of the year, hopefully sooner. Nancy has also been organizing pictures and news clippings in albums.

Ad Hoc Survey Committee:

David reported that the committee met on July 31st to make some decisions on how to proceed. They have decided that they will use parts of the Chicopee survey and some additional information will be added. There is a question on how much demographic information they will need. They will meet again on November 10th and try to come to a consensus about how to proceed. All members have copies of the questionnaire from the Chicopee survey.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Barbara reported. She went to two HVES meetings. On September 3rd they discussed nutrition with the chef and had a picnic. On September 8th there was a Board of Directors Meeting. John Lutz announced that there were 55 proposals for the Caring Community Grants and they are in the process of review. The next HVES meeting is October 6th and the subject will be the HVES menu and secondly, the cost of fuel and utilities this winter and the impact on the budgets of people with fixed incomes.

Nancy let COA members know that she has not heard from HVES about the Senior Center's Nutrition Grant funding grant request, but she is expecting to find out soon. She is concerned because the current funding of \$.91 per meal is not adequate to cover the \$.50 per mile gas reimbursement most of the deliverers request now. Nancy also said that there have been several more people coming to the congregate meal over the last few weeks.

Adjournment. The COA meeting ended at 10:40 AM.

The next meeting of the COA will be held on October 2nd, 2008 at 9:00 AM.

Please note:

The October 2nd Meeting was later canceled and the next meeting will be held on November 6th.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Erman, Administrative Assistant

The approved minutes of the July 10, 2008 meeting were delivered to the Selectboard office to be filed.